

Fujioka Historical Museum

Stone Age (Paleolithic Period)

Humans have inhabited Japan from at least 35,000 years ago, when Japan was connected to the Asian mainland. These early humans are believed to have been nomadic hunter/gatherers who rarely stayed in one place for prolonged periods. They did, however, make and use stone tools.

Bones older than 10,000 years are rarely found in Japan's volcanic soil; stones are the evidence usually used to research the Stone Age. To identify sites, archaeologists look for stone implements, stone chips, and traces of stone tool-making activity.

One of the first Stone Age campsites to be found in Japan is at Iwajuku, about 15 kilometers northeast of Fujioka. This 1946 find confirmed that humans inhabited Japan prior to 10,000 BCE.

Since the discovery at Iwajuku, Stone Age sites have also been found in other parts of Gunma, including around Fujioka. Archaeologists theorize that most Stone Age people in Japan occupied coastal regions that are now inundated, since sea levels today are higher than they were in Paleolithic times. However, the natural abundance of the Tone River valley, with its diverse wildlife, likely attracted Stone Age inhabitants and other prehistoric people in later years.

The artifacts on display at the museum include stone axes and spearheads as well as stones that were used as knives.